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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the problem of (1) maintaining the size and quality of the overall graduate school, and (2) maintaining a "critical mass" of students enrolled in programs where there is an indication of a future demand, but where there has been a decline. University marketing techniques have not generally focused on graduate student recruitment, but recent economic and demographic changes showing a shrinking undergraduate enrollment could impact the graduate enrollment. Also problematic is a more diverse college student population that views graduate programs in the arts and sciences with less interest. Marketing techniques have included institutional research on applicant pools, on students who were admitted, and on the various sources of students, as well as the employment of some advertising and trend analysis. Marketing is used less than other recruitment techniques because the expertise is somewhat foreign to the graduate and to the associate dean. The number of non-U.S. graduate students is growing and will continue. Graduate deans should be aware of the importance of the non-U.S. graduate student population and become familiar with the statistics in this area. (GLR)

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Marketing and Recruitment for Graduate Programs *

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While the number of students enrolled in graduate programs has remained relatively stable for several years, the recruitment of qualified graduate students remains a major concern. There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is that the overall stability in enrollment masks considerable variation among disciplines and schools. The last decade saw significant enrollment declines in disciplines such as history in response to poor job prospects. In contrast, there were significant increases in M.B.A programs because of good job prospects. Hence, there is concern at two levels, one to maintain the size and quality of the overall school, and another to maintain a "critical mass" of students enrolled in programs where there is an indication of a future demand, but where there has been a decline. Current projections of enrollment trends and future needs for scientists, engineers, and college faculty in the arts and sciences all suggest that the overall prospects for graduate education in the 1990s are good (Bowen and Sosa, 1989; NCES, 1989; CGS, 1990). It is likely to remain variable by discipline, however.

Marketing efforts by graduate schools have been somewhat haphazard. The 1986 survey of CGS members by Patricia Baron indicated that the idea of marketing graduate education is a relatively new one. She noted that while "the literature on institutional marketing and student recruitment has grown dramatically . . . most of it has centered on undergraduate student recruitment and enrollment management" (Baron, 1987). In Baron's survey, 250 graduate schools responded to a variety of questions about their recruitment programs and resources. Her findings indicate that most of us are using the same strategies and techniques. We are providing financial assistance. We are developing and distributing promotional materials to describe the school, specific programs and departments. Our faculties are using personal contacts to recruit promising students and we are using publications such as Peterson's to promote graduate offerings. Marketing techniques have included institutional research on applicant pools, on students who were admitted, and on the various sources of students. They have included research on the features and qualities of the institution that differentiated it from other schools, and the use of recruitment information systems which provided easily retrievable information about prospective students. Market studies also provided research on demographic change, future employment needs, and enrollment trends. Advertising was still far down on the list reported by Baron. Marketing techniques, including advertising, were used less than other means for recruiting students, in part because they require a level of marketing sophistication which is not usually found in the person of a graduate dean or associate dean. Indeed, marketing techniques are not generally undertaken by just one unit of a university. If the university has embarked on a marketing effort for all or some of its schools, then the graduate school can became part of an overall package, which requires hiring specialists in advertising and public affairs.

Mary G. Powers

"The bottom line is that the marketing of graduate education programs is something that is here to stay."

Recent economic and demographic changes could have a negative impact on graduate programs. The smaller number of undergraduates in recent years will produce a smaller pool of college graduates to enter graduate programs. Also, the more diverse college population of the nineties includes a larger proportion who do not see graduate education in the arts and sciences as part of their future. This has been, and will be made up only partially

(continued on page 5)

* A presentation made at the 30th Annual Meeting of CGS, San Francisco, California, December, 1990.

Inside

Linney on the FY92 Budget 2
Budget Requests and Comparisons 3
Syverson on Non-U.S. Citizens in Graduate Programs 4
Report on Strategy for University Research in Canada 6
Minority Scholarships 7
Mark Clark's Dean's Corner ... 8

Marketing & Recruitment

(continued from page 1)

by adults undergoing career changes or deciding to go back to school for one reason or another. It has, therefore, become necessary for graduate schools to do what colleges have already learned to do, that is, to market and advertise their programs to potential students. And where, in the past, recruitment for graduate programs has been effective as a decentralized activity left largely to departments, it is now necessary to add to departmental activity some more centralized professional efforts.

As noted previously, schools have come to rely on a combination of recruitment strategies and techniques, including centralized marketing and advertising activities, along with attractive promotional materials and attendance at graduate fairs and forums. Because these things are expensive, we must evaluate what are the most and least cost-effective techniques. Is there more to be gained from developing better brochures, or increasing travel to graduate fairs and forums, or from placing full page ads in the *New York Times*. In order to evaluate effectiveness, it is important to know first what type of student the school is seeking. Only then can we ask what is the best way to get information to that student. Schools such as Fordham, in large urban areas, with a mix of full-time and part-time students may, in fact, find it cost-effective to advertise in a paper like the *New York Times*. This may not work at all for a school in a rural area, or one with

(continued on page 9)

Marketing & Recruitment

(continued from page 5)

a smaller regional market. A small school which has primarily master's level programs in education, social work, or business might find it useful to work with school districts or other local organizations, an approach which could be totally unproductive for a graduate school emphasizing Ph.D. programs in the arts and sciences. In doctoral-granting institutions, it may be more cost-effective and more productive, in terms of the quality of students, to adopt one strategy for doctoral granting departments with high-profile, nationally visible programs, and other strategies for departments which have primarily master's programs and attract regional students on a part-time basis. In point of fact, we are doing exactly that at Fordham.

In 1986, we reviewed who our students were, who they were likely to be over the next five years, and who we wanted them to be. We had been working on a five-year plan which called attention to the diversity of our programs and of our student body. We had the usual array of traditional graduate programs that attracted mostly students seeking the Ph.D. and/or master's level work that led to the Ph.D. In addition, we had programs enrolling several types of part-time students. Some were students seeking the M.A. in pre-professional programs such as one in public policy and administration which attracted persons interested in careers in government at the state or local level, and one in pastoral planning and research for persons engaged in institutional research and education for churches and other religious organizations. We also had some students who had been out of school and had returned for personal enrichment purposes or to upgrade skills. Many women are in this group, and want to pursue a graduate degree before reentry into the labor force. Part-time students include very diverse groups and are changeable over time. We had little systematic information on this particular market.

At about that same time, 1986, the university was embarking on an advertising campaign for some of its ten schools. At first I was not at all sure I wanted the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to be part of that effort. I have, however, become somewhat of a convert to the notion of using more than one recruitment strategy. Our marketing effort has several aspects. It is still important for department faculty to use personal contacts with their colleagues in other schools to recruit full-time students to the large doctoral programs. We know who these students are, and we know where they are. The main goal here is to provide them with current information about the programs that we offer and to highlight major strengths. At Fordham we did this by upgrading promotional materials. It is important that someone in the dean's office work closely with the public affairs department in the development of promotional materials as well as advertising. The creative marketing person may not always appreciate the unique requirements of graduate education. Our public affairs office, for example, had a good idea for producing a common core piece that they thought could be used in the front of brochures and catalogs for *all* schools. It emphasized the life style and cultural advantages of the university that would appeal to an undergraduate market, however, and was inappropriate for a graduate school catalog or brochure. By working with the group, we were able to develop more suitable material.

With respect to the recruitment of full-time students, probably the best thing we did was to improve the promotional materials. We moved from a general university brochure listing descriptions of department programs and focused instead on specific department and program brochures, particularly department posters that are mailed to schools likely to produce applicants to Fordham's graduate programs and from which we would like to recruit students. We also increased our participation in graduate fairs and forums and brought along promotional materials to distribute at these events.

Once marketing strategies expanded this way, it became necessary to devote a major portion of one person's time to admissions and recruitment activities—attending fairs and forums, contacting other schools, developing advertising and promotional materials with the Public Affairs staff, providing personal contact with applicants, etc. It is important to note that, for all of us, recruit-

(continued on page 10)

Marketing & Recruitment

(continued from page 9)

ment has become a much more professional activity than it has been in the recent past.

These efforts have proven to be effective in terms of the increased number of inquiries about our programs. All of those discussed thus far, however, are aimed primarily at the full-time student and, like many other institutions, we have a limited amount of financial aid for them. To maintain and improve the quality of students admitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, we limited the number of fellowships and assistantships offered and provided a somewhat higher stipend level. Knowing that most full-time students come in response to financial aid packages and wanting to maintain the number of full-time students we had, we needed to find some additional sources of income. We worked to increase assistantships that were covered by budgets from units other than the financial aid budget of the graduate school (radio station, library, computer center, etc.) and obtained some outside funding. Nonetheless, this limited financial aid meant we had to limit the numbers of full-time students, as relatively few highly-qualified graduate students attend graduate schools of arts and sciences full time and pay for it themselves. The larger number of inquiries and the larger applicant pool resulting from our improved marketing effort contributed to an overall improvement in the quality of full-time students, however.

Next we turned our attention to the recruitment of part-time students. Enrollment of part-time students had remained pretty flat for a number of years. While we had developed some imaginative new programs and expected increased numbers, we were aware that there was a market of people who were changing careers, returning to school, and seeking certain kinds of programs, and these were people who, by and large, we did not reach directly with any of the techniques noted above. We responded when they called or wrote for materials but had a limited ability to reach out to them.

The part-time student market is much harder to define than the full-time one. Posters, brochures, personal contacts, attendance at graduate fairs and forums, are aimed essentially at people who more or less know what they want to do. They want information about a particular program and we provide them with the basic information that encourages them to apply. That other large group of people who are out of school, perhaps thinking of going back but not quite sure what they want to do, are harder to reach. The advertising campaign is aimed primarily at that group.

Graduate education at Fordham has always included a sizable number of part-time students. In addition to the development of solid, traditional doctoral programs, some of which take only full-time students, we have always made graduate education available to those who can attend only part time. Currently, this group includes people who are making a career change, who have been out of school for some time and feel it would be enriching to go back and perhaps get a master's degree, and people who need to upgrade their skills in a particular area in which they had graduate training ten or fifteen years ago. They are hard to reach. They do not attend fairs or forums, and they do not talk with faculty in their field of interest on a routine basis. Advertising is a means of reaching this audience. The graduate school became part of an ad campaign designed for five of the ten schools which developed ads for the *New York Times*, particularly the *Education Supplement* and other papers in our market area.

It would be inaccurate to report that we discovered a need and developed a formal plan to identify, recruit, and admit the very best graduate students we could find. Few graduate schools have a full-blown, well-defined market-

ing plan or strategy. What we did do was to recognize that a need existed to identify and recruit several different populations: the full and part-time students, those interested in traditional graduate programs, those interested in more professionally-oriented programs and those interested in the enrichment type programs that we offer. In our case, the marketing plan developed incrementally as we began to identify what were our prospect pools, what we might do in order to reach those potential graduate students and how we could track candidates once they made an inquiry.

The new marketing and recruitment strategy coincided with the introduction of a new student information system in the university. Much of that system is still used to monitor applications rather than the activities preceding applications, but we can now track the sources of inquiry and any action beyond the application. We are working on linking inquiry to application. By the end of this year we will have in place a fairly complete tracking system from initial inquiry down through admission and registration.

What are the results of all this effort? First, a marked increase has occurred in the number of inquiries received over the last three years, from 5,483 in 1987-88, to 6,322 in 1988-89, and last year, 1989-90, a major increase to 11,185 inquiries. Thus far this year (July through November, 1990), we have received 9,862 inquiries. While inquiries are not completed applications and certainly are not students in the classroom or laboratory, the increase in inquiries did lead to an increase of 54% in the number of applications. Because of financial aid limitations, we could not increase the number of full-time students very much, but we did attract a higher-quality pool of students. The GRE scores of students admitted to virtually every department were higher this past year, particularly among full-time students with financial support.

That is the up side. There are some problems, but they are "good" problems, that must be taken into account. We overspent our postage budget by a sizable amount last year, have already overspent this year, and are running out of promotional materials because we did not estimate or project an increase in the number of inquiries from 6,000 to 11,000. Each inquiry requires some response in the form of materials. Our greatest successes, particularly with full-time doctoral students, have come when the departments have also responded. There are costs to the expanded recruitment effort. Besides the need for additional personnel, are increased postage and publication costs of promotional materials. Some savings were realized by mailing brochures rather than detailed (and heavy) catalogs for the initial response. The latest postal increase will absorb that savings quickly, however.

Finally, one has to realize that not everything works. For example, we tried advertising in college newspapers, which seemed a reasonable approach since such ads appear in the Fordham College paper. Our Public Affairs staff had predicted that the results would not be impressive, and after experimenting for one year, we agreed with them. We found that students do, however, go to the posters that are hanging in the departments. Besides normal faculty contacts among departments, the use of department posters is probably the single best strategy for attracting full-time students. On the other hand, the advertising campaign in the major newspapers around New York, particularly the educational supplement, appears to be a major source for reaching part-time students.

In addition to advertising new programs and placing Fordham before that public of potential students, such advertising serves another purpose—what public affairs people call an "image effect." That is, a much larger public becomes aware of the university. Since this is part of an overall campaign of five of the ten schools, the public becomes aware of a large, complex institution. It is not possible to gauge the return on such "image effects."

The results thus far suggest that we should continue our efforts this year and put into place a good, complete system for tracking students and for evaluating each of the various approaches we have developed—advertising, promotional materials, trips to graduate fairs and forums, etc. In a tight economy, it is unlikely that any school will be able to keep up with increasing costs in all areas and will have to make some choices among them. The bottom line is that the marketing of graduate education programs is something that is here to stay.

I want to add a few caveats to my summary of what we are doing at Fordham. It is important to work with competent public affairs, marketing and/or public relations personnel. One of the first things that most of us, as academics, have to learn is that marketing is not "selling" as such. It involves identifying potential students and, to use marketing terminology, potential service areas. We use marketing to assess the kinds of programs that our university offers compared to programs offered in other schools. We also use marketing tools to assess our strengths and weaknesses compared to other schools and to identify our niche in graduate education. Marketing is used to bring the message of the graduate school to potential students. This assumes that we have viable programs to describe and promote, that we know who our current students are and what changes we want to make in the student population. (How do we bring in more minority students? More international students? More part-time students?)

It is also important to know what potential graduate students expect of our programs. If a school is offering only traditional graduate programs leading to the Ph.D., then students should be so informed up front, and those seeking a master's degree for enrichment purposes, or those seeking professional programs will not be disappointed. Finally it also assumes, of course, that the programs we describe and market are the very best that our institutions can offer and that they will meet the expectations of our students, whether they are in the applied areas or "traditional" areas.

If we remain relatively clear with respect to understanding what the strengths and weaknesses of our programs are, who the students are that will benefit most from those programs, and if we work with competent professionals to bring our message to those students, then in all likelihood even the most traditional academic dean will be able to contribute to a successful marketing strategy.

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